Inter-church Coalitions as Site of Ecumenical Contact and Conflict: the Canada China Programme, 1971-2000

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Studies of Canada-China relations in the 20th century have concentrated on three major aspects: missionary connections before the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949; political relations with a focus on Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s path breaking recognition of communist China in 1970; and trade ties. The study of trade and politics intermingle, but accounts of the Canadian missionary presence end with the expulsion of the missionaries in the early 1950s. Yet did religious contacts cease? The existence of at least one organization, the Canada China Programme (CCP), suggests that they were still present in the later twentieth century. From the 1970s until the 1990s, the CCP was the major channel for renewed church-to-church contacts between Canada and China. Its largely untold

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Canadian Catholic Historical Association annual meeting in 2014. Thanks are due to participants who shared their thoughts at that meeting and also to Theresa Chu RCSJ, Fleurette Lagacé MIC, Bruce Henry, and members of the Bishop’s University Writing Group (Vicki Chartrand, Sunny Lau, Heather Lawford, and Anthony di Mascio). They are not, of course, responsible for any errors or shortcomings. This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Selected research materials are posted at the project website at http://transpacificchurches.blogspot.ca/


3 The abbreviation CCP is used despite being the same as the normal abbreviation for Chinese Communist Party; where confusion may arise, we have spelled out the name in full or referred to “the Programme.”
story helps to broaden our understanding of Canada-China relations, while also shedding light on an effort by Canadian churches to carry out their own alternative foreign policy.

The CCP was part of a constellation of ecumenical coalitions, sponsored by both Catholic and mainline Protestant4 churches—Anglican, United and Presbyterian and representatives of the Mennonite Central Committee and Christian Church (Disciples)5—that flourished from the 1970s into the 1990s, as the churches sought to insert themselves into national debates on social justice, human rights and global partnerships.6 In the China case, Canadian churches were torn between their desire to promote their principles and the need to satisfy the demands of their Chinese partners for relative silence. Paradoxically, while the CCP promoted ecumenical coalitions, it also saw inter-church competition. On one side were those who were willing to work with the Chinese government’s approved churches; on the other, militant anti-communists who attacked the Programme as too pro-China. Additionally, the CCP experienced divisions between Catholics and Protestants over Canadian ecumenical politics and contrasting attitudes towards Chinese expressions of Christianity. Reflecting the diversity of its presence in China, Canadian Catholic representation initially included members both of the diocesan clergy and of several religious orders. When Canadian Catholics withdrew their organizational and financial support in the 1990s, the CCP fell apart and was forced to merge with the Canada Asia Working Group (CAWG), an ecumenical coalition with a very different emphasis. This marriage failed as the CCP’s emphasis on quiet partnership with constrained Chinese churches clashed with CAWG’s insistence on social justice and human rights principles.

This article examines the CCP through the two decades in which it attempted to revive and mend the political minefield of relations between Canadian and Chinese Christians. It draws primarily on the Programme’s records, the first use of this collection, and supplements the archival record with publications and the minutes of the Canadian Catholic Round Table on China, an affiliated committee in which Catholics sought to map out a

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4 For the sake of convenience, Protestant in this article is used in an institutional rather than a theological sense to cover members of the Canadian Council of Churches, including the Anglican Church of Canada.


divergent course from the Protestant churches that dominated the CCP. Yet this essay does not seek to deconstruct the archival record of this little-known coalition. With Ann Stoler, we take “a less assured and perhaps more humble stance—to explore the [archival] grain with care and read along it first.”8 Reading with the grain, we see the CCP as an organization with its own goals and, at the same time, as a site within which Canadian churches cooperated and contended with one another.

After Mao Zedong’s communists declared the People’s Republic of China in October 1949, they moved to expel Western missionaries. The shock of “losing” China as a mission field is evident in numerous accounts by missionaries and their chroniclers.9 Canadian Catholics, especially in Québec, had been in close contact with their Chinese contemporaries for much of the twentieth century, affecting each other culturally and politically.10 Québec sent many priests and nuns through such orders as the Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception who served in China from their foundation in 1909 to their final expulsion in 1952,11 and the Missionary Sisters of Notre-Dame-des-Anges of Lennoxville. In 1921, Canadian Catholic leaders had created the Société des Missions-Étrangères (SME) in order to give French Canadians a place in evangelization, rather than working with missionaries

7 CCP papers are held at the United Church of Canada Archives (UCCA) in Toronto, fonds 2002.004C. The Round Table’s records are on file at the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops Archives (henceforth CCCBA) in Ottawa, box U3173. References to CCP papers are given henceforth as CCP, box and file number. To our knowledge, neither collection has been accessed before. We are grateful to both archives for making these papers available.


from other countries. China was its first and foremost mission field. Until the creation of the People’s Republic, Canadians, notably in Québec, were generous donors to the Chinese missions. Québec led the French-speaking world in per capita contributions to China missionary work, through the Saint-Enfance and other collections.

The SME’s English-speaking counterpart, the Toronto-based Scarboro Foreign Missions Society, maintained a mission in Zhejiang province. Founded in 1919 as the first Canada-based mission society, it entered China seven years later, joined by the Grey Sisters of Pembroke, Ontario. By 1948, the Society’s efforts were recognized when they were given a diocese (Lishui) that was independent from the French-run diocese of Ningbo to which they had previously reported. Though their numbers were only half that of Québec’s SME, the Scarboro society played an influential role in drawing attention to China in Canada: its journal China reportedly had a circulation of almost 100,000.

After the creation of the People’s Republic, anti-communist attitudes among Canadian Catholics contended with more sympathetic views towards China. The missionary who recalled that evangelization was “just beginning to come along when the Commies came in and spoiled everything” was typical. At the same time, many missionaries hoped for eventual Chinese control of the dioceses of China. In this light, China’s re-opening after the 1970s represented hope for a new beginning for Canadian Catholics as much as for Protestants.

Rather than being lumped together under the umbrella of Christianity, Catholic and Protestant churches in China acted as separate religions. Missionaries even had their own terms for “God,” as if the Catholic term Tianzhu (Lord of Heaven) represented a different deity than the Protestant Shangdi (God on High) or Shen (Lord). This distinction, common throughout Asia, stems from the fact that both strains of Christianity made their biggest impact in tandem with late nineteenth and early twentieth century imperialism—a time when European Protestants and Catholics were often at loggerheads. One result has been the development of two separate historiographies. Historians tended to portray Protestant missions as progressing from pure evangelism, through medical and educational mission work, to an imperative of “partnership” with self-governing Chinese

13 Grant Maxwell, Assignment in Chekiang: 71 Canadians in China 1902-1954 (Toronto: Scarboro Foreign Mission Society, 1982). Zhejiang is the current spelling of what was previously transliterated in English as Chekiang.
14 Maxwell, Assignment in Chekiang, 39.
churches. In contrast, they paint Catholic missions as being more purely concentrated on conversion, less changing, more conservative.\textsuperscript{15}

With the founding of the People’s Republic, an officially atheist regime deeply suspicious of missionaries, the officially recognized arms of the Protestant and Catholic Churches in China struggled to balance loyalty to the government and their mandate to witness to Christian values and speak up for social justice. Chinese Christians, who were already moving towards autonomy,\textsuperscript{16} clearly saw that they had to purge themselves of foreign control. From this sentiment arose the Christian and nationalist Three Self Patriotic Movement, which called for Chinese churches to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. Y.T. Wu, a Christian socialist who was willing to work with the Chinese Communists, led the movement. In 1950, Wu co-authored the “Christian Manifesto” which vowed to purge Christianity of imperialism. He was also one of the leading figures of the “Denunciation Movement,” in which Chinese Christians condemned earlier foreign missionaries as unrepentant imperialists. With others who became Three Self leaders, he struggled to preserve the Protestant churches in Maoist China. His supporters praised his ability to keep the church alive; opponents chastised his willingness to make peace with power and even take part in purges of underground Christians, especially evangelical Christians.\textsuperscript{17}

According to the Rev. James G. Endicott, the prominent Canadian Protestant missionary who later headed a series of antiwar movements, won the Stalin Peace Prize, and published the \textit{Far Eastern Newsletter}, Wu “showed the way for Christians to understand and support the great revolutionary changes which brought a large measure of social salvation to the Chinese people.”\textsuperscript{18}

The Three Self Movement was also the fulfilment of Protestant hopes for indigenous churches free of missionary control. It represented a new alliance of Chinese Christians with an officially atheist Chinese state. This had significant implications for Chinese Catholics—and not only for those who accepted membership in the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association


\textsuperscript{18} “In Memoriam: Dr. YT Wu 1890-1979” by James G. Endicott, CCP 12-4.
(CCPA), the Catholic equivalent of the Three Self Movement. Catholic observers like Sister Theresa Chu RSCJ, a Chinese-born member of the Society of the Sacred Heart, and second director of the CCP, reported a division between Catholics "who unquestioningly obeyed ecclesiastical authorities and those who tried to mediate between ecclesiastical and civil authorities." In refusing any Vatican oversight, even over the selection of bishops, the Three Self attitude of the CCPA made full communion with the universal Catholic Church difficult, if not impossible.

Chinese government-approved leaders were very hostile to the Vatican and any foreign interference in Chinese church affairs. One Three Self Movement leader wrote bluntly: "Churches in old China were, in fact, the extension of foreign missions and consequently were unable to take root in Chinese soil for the propagation of the Gospel." He attacked the Vatican for "interference from abroad, regardless of its appealing slogans, [which] tells us that there are indeed some people overseas trying to sabotage our efforts to build up a Chinese church." Anglican Bishop K.H. Ting (Ding Guangxum) made the same point more subtlety: "Ours is essentially the work of inheriting from a missionary past with both its strengths and weaknesses, and making the Church in China just as Chinese as that in Canada is Canadian, so as to make the Christian gospel communicable to our people."

While many Chinese Catholics and Protestants refused to support the Three Self Movement or the CCPA and met unofficially in "house churches," the Three Self Movement and the CCPA asserted their sway over Chinese Christians after 1950. For some leaders of the two groups, loyalty to the new Communist rulers was a virtue; for others, a necessity. "Just as God long ago used Cyrus, so today He is using Chairman Mao to cleanse His church," one Christian—whose name was kept anonymous to avoid reprisals—wrote to a former missionary in Canada.

From the beginning of the People's Republic until the launching of Chairman Mao's "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," Christians in China faced pressure to line up with the government-approved religious bodies, which were overseen by a government department in Beijing. Beginning in 1966, the Cultural Revolution turned its wrath even on these approved Christian groups as part of an all-out attack on religion. Consequently,

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19 "Learning from Catholics in Wuxi" by Theresa Chu (Nov. 1987), CCP 7-5. Underlining in original.
20 "International Relations of the Chinese Church" by Han Wenzao, paper delivered at "God's Call to a New Beginning" conference, Montreal, Oct. 1981, CCP 5-4.
even the official churches were forced into silence. Restrictions on religion softened after Mao's death in 1976. Under the more pragmatic leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China began to resume contacts with the West. It permitted approved Christian groups to resume their activities, including relations with foreign church groups. There would be no new missionary effort, but dialogue could resume. After 1979, Deng's government repealed laws that imposed special sanctions on religion; complete freedom of religion was not restored, but restrictions on worship vanished one by one until religious leaders felt free to promote their faiths, though not to criticize their government openly.23 Buddhist, Christian and other religious leaders were allowed to form the first Chinese delegation to the triennial gathering of the World Conference on Religion and Peace held in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1979. Outreach from the Three Self Movement thrilled officials in the Canadian Protestant churches who had once had mission fields in China. The Canadian response came in the same form as China's churches: along ecumenical rather than denominational lines.

The CCP can be traced back to the founding of what was initially called the China Working Group in 1971 in Toronto. In an era when the understanding of mission was changing, and informed by the missionary and "world concerns" arms of the Canadian Council of Churches (then representing only Protestant churches), the organization initially aimed at "reawakening the institutional churches' interest in China." The CCP approached China in a non-triumphalist spirit, very different from the one that had led Canadians into early 20th century China. As one participant in the founding meeting warned, "The churches must not be poised on the border of China planning a new invasion."24 China had remained on the minds of some Canadian Christians, but the note was less of triumph than of tragedy. The United Church booklets that once ran hopeful graphic illustrations of missionary inroads into the vast population of China in the 1950s and 1960s25

25 For instance Our West China mission: being a somewhat extensive summary by the missionaries on the field of the work during the first twenty-five years of the Canadian Methodist mission in the Province of Szechwan, Western China (Toronto: Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1920).
now lamented lost hopes as they reported the suffering of missionaries who had been jailed, tortured, and expelled.26

Unlike the American “China lobby” of former missionaries and their supporters who drove opposition to any recognition of the People’s Republic of China, a left-leaning group of former Protestant missionaries in China dominated the discussions that led to the formation of the CCP. They had some sympathy with the motivations of Chinese Communists and even admiration for their efforts to change their country, though some opposed recognition of the People’s Republic. Left-liberal missionaries were more prevalent in Canadian churches than south of the border—not to mention somewhat freer from McCarthyist pressures. The initial chair, E.H. (Ted) Johnson, a former missionary who later became moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, was no communist. Still, he saw no reason to shake fists at the People’s Republic, preferring a friendlier approach. So too did the others who provided early intellectual inspiration for the Canada China Programme. James Endicott had faced censure for his pro-communist views from the United Church of Canada. (When the United Church leadership vindicated him in 1982, CPP members celebrated that “joyous event” with a potluck supper in Toronto.27 The leadership of the United Church had embraced one of the CCP’s inspirations, a move the Programme saw as implicit endorsement of its own stance of approaching “Red China” in friendship.) Earl Wilmott, among the last missionaries to leave China, did so dressed in a Mao suit, with words of praise for the new China, rather than angry denunciations.28 Katharine Hockin, who had witnessed Communist forces “liberate” Sichuan, felt that Canadian Christians had much to learn in revising their views of mission and not condemning the People’s Republic. Canadian Christians might not agree with all that Chinese counterparts had done, she wrote in a book that was influential among CCP members, but she asked: “Can we not learn how to support them, rather than contributing on our part to the deepening alienation that brings into the Christian fraternity the tensions of the cold war?”29

26 For instance Stewart A. Allen, Trial of Faith: The Imprisonment of a Medical Missionary Under Chinese Communism, 1950-1951 (Brockville ON, no publisher, 1995).
Programme meetings took place in Toronto, and Toronto-based Protestant churches dominated the CCP’s governing bodies. By 1976, it hired a director—Raymond Whitehead, a Protestant theologian who moved from Hong Kong to Toronto to take the job.30 The missionary legacy was reflected on the first page of the first issue of its newsletter, *China and Ourselves*, launched with a run of 750 copies. “Given the long history of Christian work in China, the continuing concern for development of peoples, and the impact of China on the Third World and the West,” it noted, “the Program [sic] is particularly well placed for confronting issues of social justice and for developing dialogue among people of different world views.”31 Through *China and Ourselves*—a name chosen to highlight both information-sharing and reflection on the Canadian missionary legacy—the CCP shared stories that ranged from boat people to bicycle factories, religion to revolutionary thought.

Catholics only began coordinating their participation towards the end of the 1980s,32 although two Canadian Catholic missionary societies (Missions-Étrangères and Scarboro), and several religious orders with a China interest (the Jesuits; Holy Ghost Fathers; Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Pembroke, Ont. and Missionary Sisters of Notre Dame des Anges of Lennoxville, Quebec) had earlier joined individually.33

In 1980, Catholic sources contributed 25% of the Programme’s budget, not far from their share in other ecumenical coalitions, while the United Church provided 32%, the Anglicans 15%, and the Presbyterians 9%, with the balance from smaller denominations and other income such as honoraria for speeches.34 Over half of the Catholic contribution came from the Scarboro Foreign Missions. The remainder, scattered contributions from religious orders and missionary societies, reflected a missionary legacy in China work. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) made no contribution at this time. In effect, Catholic participants took a relatively marginal position in the early years. When one issue of *China and Ourselves* criticized Vatican policy, a Catholic board member angrily returned a stack of copies to the CCP office. No change in the editorial line was evident.

The CCP’s first major conference displayed its self-conscious links to the Protestant social gospel tradition. Held in Fort Qu’Appelle, Saskatchewan

30 China Working Group minutes 1 April 1975, CCP 14-5.
31 “Introducing the Canada China Program,” *China and Ourselves* (C&O) no. 1 (May 1976), 1; CCP administration committee minutes, 8 Sept. 1976, CCP 14-5. All 75 issues of C&O can be found at http://transpacificchurches.blogspot.ca/
33 CCP provisional committee membership list, CCP 15-3.
34 CCP statement of receipts and disbursements, CCP 15-3.
in September 1979, the 80-person gathering demonstrated an awareness of both changes in China and counter-culture protest movements in Canada. It portrayed “a church challenged by the Chinese revolution and the protests in Canadian society” and struck a note of repentance.\textsuperscript{35} Organizers suggested that there was much ill in the China missionary legacy, but the social gospel experience offered a uniquely Canadian contribution to the global resumption of Christian dialogue with China.\textsuperscript{36}

Progressive Canadian Christianity and the desire to take a non-confrontational approach to China continued to inform CCP initiatives. Its major partner was the China Christian Council, the official church of Chinese Protestants and the yin to the Three Self Movement’s yang. Bishop K.H. Ting, who became head of the Christian Council in 1980, was the CCP’s key partner in China. Ting had degrees from St. John’s University, the college founded in Shanghai in 1879 by American Episcopalian missionaries, and from Columbia University. In 1946-47 he parlayed his work with the international church in Shanghai into a job with the Student Christian Movement in Toronto. He also worked for the World Council of Churches in Geneva before being consecrated Anglican bishop of Zhejiang (Chekiang). Fluent in North American English, Ting was familiar with the stone masonry and the carved pews of downtown Toronto’s university and churches. In the 1980s he moved nimbly between Western Christian circles and the National People’s Congress, China’s rubber-stamp parliament, where he sat as a deputy. He developed a particular friendship with Ted Johnson, who praised him for “working to make the Christian Church something rooted in China so that it will no longer be accused and dismissed as simply a hangover of Western cultural imperialism”—in other words, for being self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. \textit{China and Ourselves} was similarly admiring of Ting as a major figure.\textsuperscript{37} For its part, the CCP was able to open doors for Ting, whose Canadian speaking tour in 1979 included a lunch with Prime Minister Joe Clark arranged by Douglas Roche, the Conservative MP and prominent Catholic peace activist.\textsuperscript{38} Ting spoke out for the stand-alone


\textsuperscript{36} Christopher Lind, CCP intern, to Prof A.R. Allen of Montreal, 17 Jan 1979, CCP 3-11.


\textsuperscript{38} Roche to Ting, 25 Sept. 1979, CCP 4-1.
Chinese churches, and their rejection of the missionary connection. “The Three Self,” Ting said, “is nothing but a movement by Chinese Protestants to make our religion truly autonomous. In other words, we want Christianity in China to be as national as the Church of England is English. We shouldn’t be an appendage to American, British and Canadian Mission Boards.”

In the spring of 1981, the CCP began planning an international conference in Montreal, to provide an opportunity for Christians to meet informally. The conference was a continuation of inter-church dialogue with Chinese Christians, a process that went back to a 1974 colloquium in Louvain, Belgium when nearly 100 church leaders and some non-church people discussed the theme “Christian Faith and the Chinese Experience.” It also reflected the CCP left-liberal perspective. As its title reflected, the conference was conceived as “God’s Call to a New Beginning” in church contacts with China that would seek to avoid the perceived missionary errors of the past. Prominent among the planners were left-leaning former Canadian missionaries to China, particularly the Endicott family. Preparations for the conference were under way when the CCP hired its second director, Sister Theresa Chu. A citizen of South Korea, Chu worried that she would not be welcomed home after arguing in her University of Chicago doctoral dissertation that there were some compatibilities between Mao’s thought and Christian teachings. Whitehead, with whom she had worked in Hong Kong, nominated her as his replacement. The board welcomed a Catholic to replace the outgoing Protestant director as a signal of continued Catholic involvement in the coalition, while making sure that she would not alter the Programme’s direction.

Invitations to the Montreal meeting were a major concern. Should they center on the “leadership of the church in China,” meaning those officially recognized by the Chinese government and organized within the China Christian Council and the China Catholic Patriotic Association? Or should they also seek out members of the underground churches in order to be “truly representative, especially from the Catholic side” (as one participant wrote)? Chu asserted the independence of the CCP from the Europe-based Ecumenical China Study Liaison Group (ECSLG) and declined calls to invite all members of this group rooted in the Louvain gathering. Similarly,

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40 Article on the Louvain Colloquium for The Christian Century by Raymond Whitehead (September 1974), CCP 12-2; Charbonnier, Christians in China, 473.
41 Personal interview with Theresa Chu RCSJ, 17 Nov. 2014.
no invitation was issued to Hong Kong evangelical leader Jonathan Chao, founder of the Chinese Mission Seminary in Hong Kong and a leading figure at Louvain. Instead, the CCP invited prominent leaders of both Catholic and Protestant churches in mainland China. Ten Chinese delegates joined Christian leaders from 25 countries in Montreal in “mutual respect and support.” No heed was given to the appeal from Catholics such as Father William Ryan SJ, who feared that giving preference to the government-sponsored CCPA would freeze out Vatican-supported underground Catholic churches. Accusations of preference for certain Catholic groups in China haunted the CCP into the 1980s and 1990s, especially with its Canadian Catholic partners.

The goals of the conference were strongly tied to China’s re-emergence on the international scene and its increased openness to the outside world, a dozen years after Canada and China established diplomatic relations. This gave the CCP an opportunity to spotlight the Christian communities of China in an environment that allowed for the safe and cordial exchange of ideas. As Chu wrote to CCP members and supporters, “the goal of the conference is a sharing of experiences of Christian life and witness in different parts of the world, including China.”

The conference took place at the Centre Marial Montfortain in east Montreal from 2-7 October 1981. The Chinese delegation included Michael Fu Tieshan, who in 1979 had been ordained bishop with government, but not Vatican, approval and two others from the Catholic Patriotic Association. From the China Christian Council came K.H. Ting, Assistant-General Han Wenzao, and five other leaders. After years of little to no Western contact with the Chinese Church, the conference had to unpack lingering assumptions and misconceptions. Each day began with a worship service, making the conference the first time that Chinese Catholics and Protestants worshipped together.

In many ways the conference served as a platform for approved Chinese Christian leaders to explain their rejection of Western intervention and financial support and their commitment to build an authentically Chinese church. Presentations by the Chinese delegates included Patriotic Association Bishop Tu Shihua of Hanyang’s criticism of Vatican-affiliated missionary churches for not sufficiently indigenizing the church in China.

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43 Memorandum by Theresa Chu, CCP director, 14 Nov. 1985, CCP 9-7.
44 Ryan to Chu, 11 May 1981, CCP 4-8.
45 Chu circular letter to friends of the CCP, 26 May 2014, CCP 4-8.
46 Hockin, “God’s Call to a New Beginning,” CCP 5-11.
47 Hockin, “God’s Call to a New Beginning,” CCP 5-11; Bishop Tu’s conference paper, CCP 4-14.
The conference attracted wide interest. The official Chinese Protestant publication *Tian Feng* highlighted its positive value in introducing other Christians to the work of the Three Self Movement, in allowing for the exchange of theological ideas, and in encouraging friendliness and presenting an opportunity for the Chinese church to represent itself to the international community. "Cynthia McLean, an official with the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and a future CCP director, welcomed the new “international context in which the Chinese Christian experience would be understood as being one among many” and “an opportunity for the Chinese to learn more about Christianity in the various countries represented.”49 The conference, however, was not without critics. Jonathan Chao assailed it for being an exercise of friendship with the Three Self Movement and the Catholic Patriotic Association, not an ecumenical and theological reflection. He especially complained of exclusions, notably of members of the Vatican-supported Catholic underground churches. The preference given to government-approved Christian groups, he claimed, “allowed Chinese opinion to force a division in the outside ecumenical community, which formerly worked together on theological reflection on China, and which used to encourage a wide spectrum of opinion among its constituents.”50 He believed the Louvain process was going off the rails in Montreal; the CCP leaders, on the other hand, were listening more to Chinese voices.

After the “New Beginning” conference and efforts to dialogue with both official and unofficial congregations in China, the CCP was increasingly identified with China’s state-sanctioned churches. “From a Chinese point of view,” Chu reported to her board in 1988, “the CCP has interpreted the Chinese Churches correctly.”51 Increasingly, however, some Catholic circles in Canada criticized the Programme for paying less heed to the underground churches. Unlike the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, which took a similar line on partnership with approved churches, the CCP included both Protestant and Catholic Canadians. It could not, then, neglect the criticism, particularly the concerns raised by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops who in 1983 affirmed “the CCP because it leaves the door open for relations with the Chinese church but negates our ‘one-sided defence’ of the Patriotic Association.”52 A year later, the

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49 “God’s Call to a New Beginning,” conference report by Cynthia McLean, CCP 4-14.
51 “The CCP’s Changing Mandate” by Theresa Chu (report given to the Extended Executive Committee, 17 March 1988), CCP 7-6.
52 CCP general committee minutes, 28 Sept. 1983, CCP 14-5.
CCP noted in its defence: “The term ‘underground church’ ... means one thing to us and another to the Chinese. Whereas here, it is taken to mean heroic individuals loyal to their religious faith at any cost, there it means organization, structure and regular channels of communication with outside forces that are hostile to the New China.” The CCP did not intend to ignore unofficial churches, but the imperatives of partnership did not permit it to side with those who held up the “silent churches” as the sole authentic Christian voice in China.

In other words, the CCP was a site of Catholic-Protestant tension. When *China and Ourselves* published an article by an Anglican minister in training that asked “What Does the Vatican Really Want?” and painted the Catholic Patriotic Association as the sole authentic voice of Chinese Catholics, some Catholics objected. This was not strictly a Catholic-Protestant division: most Catholic members of the CCP believed it was on the right path. Nevertheless, the Programme experienced a struggle in which critical voices tended to assert that the underground churches were overlooked in favour of the official churches. The CCP tried to treat all Chinese Christians as partners, but its critics—many of them Catholics—charged it with failing to do so.

Because of its perceived alignment with the official churches, in 1982 the CCP became the first group to be invited to send a delegation to tour China and meet the Catholic Patriotic Association. Delegates reported a thriving attendance at Mass and services, and that “every three or four days, a new church opens.” In other words, they vested great hopes in this revived partnership. A Canadian Catholic Friendship Delegation organized by the CCP in 1985 observed further growth in Christian numbers and confidence, the creation of open seminaries and convents, and finally, the formation by Chinese Protestants of their first approved non-governmental organization: the Amity Foundation, designed to deliver charity and relief projects to the poorest Chinese.

From small beginnings, in a little over a decade Amity gathered foreign funding to build an annual budget of $2 million. Prominent China experts in

53 CCP AGM minutes, 30 June 1984, CCP 9-7.
Canada hailed Amity, an approved CCP partner, as support for the mainline Protestant churches in China and a rejection of evangelical critics. Protestant leaders linked to the CCP, including Rev. James Endicott, told Bishop Ting that Amity had "the potential of undermining some fundamentalists' attempt to infiltrate China with funds of their own." Amity appeared as a weapon for Canadian liberal Protestants in their battles with conservative evangelicals.

Bishop Ting, meanwhile, was confident enough of his own position to attack the European-based churches that had launched their own Christian dialogue with China in the early 1970s. He was particularly critical of the Ecumenical China Study Liaison Group (ECSLG), which included backers of the underground churches. Although both the ECSLG and the CCP had been part of the Louvain process through which Western churches began to re-engage with China, the CCP respected the wishes of Bishop Ting and his associates. In 1985 it decided to boycott future ECSLG meetings in favour of bilateral links between each country and the official Chinese churches. At Nanjing in 1986 Three Self leaders hosted a follow-up meeting to the 1981 "New Beginning" conference, as an effort to reclaim Chinese leadership in the field of Christian contacts with China.

Changes on the Chinese side, such as the denunciation of the ECSLG and the formation of Amity, also led to changes in Canadian church contacts with China. This was a period of ecumenical coalitions with varying memberships, but almost always including Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians and the United Church. Coalitions formed on a wide range of issues and with various geographical focuses, from the Inter-Church Coalition for Human Rights in Latin America to GATT-Fly, the Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice. The CCP was unique among ecumenical coalitions in its focus on one country and its partnership with that country's official churches. This stemmed from Canadian efforts to overcome the negative aspects of the missionary legacy through a shift towards partnership. Meanwhile, China rapidly moved from Maoist isolation into economic growth and a more open foreign policy. It was easy to maintain a positive image of China until human rights took a higher profile after the Tiananmen Square killings of 1989.

No one defended the killings, but in 1991 the CCP published a broadside against "the impression that China is one huge gulag of repression and misery." An entire issue of *China and Ourselves* consisted of a riposte by

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Cynthia McLean, an American Protestant and China watcher, who replaced Theresa Chu as CCP director in 1991. (The CCP had wanted a Protestant to succeed the Catholic Chu upon her retirement, and chose McLean, who had experience with the China work of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States.) McLean described the CCP as rooted in a shared concern for the people of China and solidarity with their struggles for independence, justice and peace. Its main organizing principles were partnership and mission. In a separate article she traced the development of the Programme through six periods: the missionary era (1888-1949), estrangement from China (1949-1970), the organizational beginnings of the CCP (1971-1981), the re-establishment of relationships with Chinese Christians (1981-1989), the Tiananmen crisis (1989), and the future of the Canada China Programme in the coming decade. The larger historical arc of China was upward, McLean argued, and Tiananmen merely an interlude that had to be overcome in the quest for partnership.

Meanwhile, Catholic-Protestant divisions within the CCP deepened over issues of relations with official and underground churches. The Catholic side was now represented by the CCCB and the Scarboro Foreign Missions, which skewed the CCP more towards missionary memories and English-speaking Canada than the other ecumenical coalitions.

Under the leadership of Sister Fleurette Lagacé MIC and Father Michel Marcil SJ, Québec Catholics interested in China had formed a group called Amitié-Chine, which sought direct contacts with China, a step that removed the need for CCP intermediaries. Amitié-Chine also spurred the creation in 1988 of a Canadian Catholic Round Table on China (Table de concertation des catholiques canadiens sur la Chine), which grouped Canadian Catholics interested in China work. The Round Table’s existence implied not only continued involvement with the CCP, but also the possibility of forming a separate, parallel organization. The Round Table centralized Catholic donations to the CCP. This single channel freed the Programme from seeking funds from each missionary society and religious order individually, and at the same time created a single and magnified Catholic voice for dealings with the CCP. The CCP would no longer even know how much had been contributed by individual Catholic groups.


61 “Canada China Programme Budgets,” CCCBA U3713-73. At the time, Catholic donations came to 28.5% of the total, compared to 42.5% from the United Church, 22.5% from the Anglicans and 8.7% from the Presbyterians.
On the whole Amitié-Chine and the Round Table worked collaboratively with the CCP, seeing eye to eye on major issues, but the CCP was less and less dominant in church-to-church relations with China. In 1987 Amitié-Chine hosted the first formal Chinese Catholic visit to Canada. As earlier contacts had shown, Chinese Catholics were happy to meet with the CCP but did not consider it the best possible dialogue partner. The delegation was a high-powered group, led by the vice-president of the (Chinese government-approved) Chinese Conference of Catholic Bishops and a vice-president of the Catholic Patriotic Association. The links with the Patriotic Association were no barrier to a meeting with half a dozen bishops in both French and English Canada and to visiting the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. By 1992, Canadian bishops were willing to receive the “patriotic” bishop of Shanghai, Aloysius Jin Luxian, for a “friendly ecumenical visit,” a step made easier by a tentative Vatican-China rapprochement. No heed was given to one priest’s complaint that Bishop Jin’s visit would “dishearten the loyal Catholics and strengthen the patriotic church which does not recognize the Pope as the Vicar of Christ on earth.” The visit fell through, but its planning indicated the CCCB’s willingness to enter dialogue with the official Catholic Church even while, like the Vatican, it described government-approved Chinese bishops as “illegitimate.”

The position of partnership with official churches in China was not a problem for United, Presbyterian and Anglican participants in the CCP, but the problems it caused in Catholic circles at times shine through in Chu’s correspondence with fellow Catholics. As Vatican-approved bishops operating underground continued to denounce the Catholic Patriotic Association, tensions mounted. By the mid-1990s, the Catholic-Protestant divergence within the CCP proved irreconcilable. As access to China improved, Michael Murray SJ of the CCCB’s missions office noted in 1988 that “The Canada-China Programme is not as vital as it once was for the conscientization of the Canadian Church to the Chinese reality.” Meanwhile, Catholic CCP members saw themselves as having a vocation for China, being

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64 Michael Murray SJ, co-director of CCCB Missions Office, to CCP, 18 March 1988, CCP 7-6.

more independent-minded in approaches towards China and less bound by the imperatives of partnership. On the other hand, they often considered the Protestant members mere voices for their own church’s bureaucracy. As recorded in the Round Table minutes: “Chaque Église protestante accepte la décision chinoise commune; ce n’est pas l’approche catholique.” Catholics related to a complex reality of official and underground Chinese churches and also had to take account of Vatican-China relations; Protestants in the CCP merely had to relate to their main partner, the China Christian Council. “We, as a Catholic group, respect their option but do not see it as ours,” the Round Table noted.

Nevertheless, the Round Table remained within the CCP despite seeing it as an “area desk” for Anglican, Presbyterian and United churches tied to the Three Self Protestant church in China, a relationship which Catholics were unwilling to enter. By 1996, when the CCP came up for remandating, the Round Table, backed by the CCCB, withdrew. United, Anglican and Presbyterian members could not afford to continue the CCP on their own, so they folded the CCP into another ecumenical coalition, the Canada Asia Working Group (CAWG). That group had been formed in 1977 to campaign for human rights throughout Asia, with an early focus on dictatorships in the Philippines and South Korea. Since China came under the mandate of the CCP, the CAWG’s mandate covered only other Asian countries. With fewer missionary connections to contend with, CAWG developed a very different version of partnership. Varied approaches to human rights, social justice and partnership led to ongoing clashes within the new coalition.

This was exacerbated by the fact that the merger of the CCP into CAWG added Catholic participants informed by such social justice issues as solidarity with the Philippine struggle against the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship. CAWG members, including the two Asian-Canadian women who formed its full-time staff, had less time for the CCP core value of partnership with government-approved Chinese churches. When a member

67 [Each of the Protestant churches accepts the common Chinese decision; that is not the Catholic approach.] Procès-verbal de la réunion du 6 septembre 1991, CCCBA U3173-48.
68 “Minutes of the ad hoc Committee on Re-Mandating of the CCP from the CCCB Mission Office’s Perspective,” 3 June 1988, CCCBA U3713-72.
of the former CCP board argued that “we have to take the lead from [our partners],” a CAWG staffer responded: “Part of our role is to gently prod our partners.” Sometimes it was not even a matter of prodding, but one of listening when Chinese partners were bold enough to stray from the topic and the official line, as happened after the Tiananmen Square killings in 1989. The merged CAWG-CCP steering committee eventually decided not to criticize China’s internal human rights record. Tensions simmered until the churches folded all the ecumenical coalitions into one new body, called KAIROS, in 2001. China work was dropped entirely, allowing the new coalition to go ahead without this source of internal conflict.

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Reflecting on the Louvain colloquium on China in 1974, Raymond Whitehead noted the meeting was still caught up in asking why the great Western missionary effort in China had failed. “It will take, perhaps, another generation in the West, and a much greater initiative from non-western Christians, to move to a new agenda on China, more appropriate to the post-missionary age,” he wrote. In the following two decades, the Programme tried to work out a new agenda that accepted Chinese Christian equality, if not leadership. The main difficulty was accepting church organizations approved by the Chinese government as major partners. Working with these organizations made good sense for Protestant churches that felt a sense of repentance for some aspects of the legacy left by Canadian missionaries, but less for Canadian Catholics who could not ignore underground Catholics—a group that, unlike the Catholic Patriotic Association, remained in communion with the Holy See.

71 CAWG minutes, 7 April 1999, CAWG G7-18.
72 At the end of one routine report, for instance appears this note from an Amity staff member:
    “As I was listening to the news, 
    I thought about my ten-year old son. 
    I used to think that when he grew up, 
    He would not have to take to the streets. 
    I might be wrong. 
    If he has to join his fellow students on the streets, 
    I WILL SUPPORT HIM. 
    If he dies for the future of his people. 
    I WILL BE PROUD OF HIM...”
73 CAWG minutes, 12-13 Sept. 2000, CAWG G7-20.
The CCP, unique in its origins among ecumenical coalitions, therefore emerged as a site of struggle especially between Catholic and Protestant voices. The CCP’s archives show multiple efforts at contact across national and denominational borders, but they also reveal conflict over how best to approach China and who to partner with in China. Tensions become ever more evident as some Protestant figures viewed the Programme as a mainline Protestant act of partnership and equality, rather than missionary arrogance, in relating to Chinese Christians. They contrasted this approach to that of evangelical Christians still trying to convert China, whom they saw as replicating the errors of the missionary past. Catholic voices within the CCP could not share this vision. These Catholic voices narrowed from multiple actors, who had their own China missionary past, into a single Catholic Round Table linked to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. They subsequently moved from expressions of concern over the mandate and direction of the Programme and downgrading of contributions into a final break over clashing visions of how to relate to Chinese Christianity. The rise and fall of the CCP paralleled the rise and fall of the wider ecumenical coalition universe, but had its own unique characteristics. Catholic and Protestant differences could be bridged in regional working groups on Africa and Latin America and in issue-driven coalitions, but the CCP could never resolve the tension created by clashing visions of partnership with China.